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ABSTRACT

Why do people have children? How do motivations for having children develop over the lifespan? This study compared the positive and negative values of having children for undergraduate college students (N=341) in 1977 and and the same subjects' (N=160) values 9 years later in 1986. Nine specific values of having children were assessed using the Value of Children Attitude Scales: (1) children for continuity, tradition, and security; (2) parenthood satisfactions and sense of achievement from children; (3) role motivations of parenthood; (4) happiness and affection from children; (5) goals and incentives from having children; (6) social status from children; (7) external controls pressuring one to become a parent; (8) the costs of children; and (9) decision-mindedness in childbearing. Results indicated that there were changes with age in the perceived motivations for having children. There was less agreement among the alumni in 1986 than when they were 9 years younger in 1977 on the values of children overall. Disagreements centered on both positive (parental satisfactions and role motivations) and negative (external controls on childbearing, costs of children, and the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing) values associated with childbearing. It seemed that the alumni were less concerned with the constraints of parenthood than they were as undergraduates while they saw parenthood as providing less of a life role and less satisfaction than they had as undergraduates. Gender and parental status also affected how children were valued. (ABL)

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A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF CHANGES IN THE VALUES OF CHILDREN BY COLLEGE ALUMNI FROM 1977 TO 1986

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by

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ABSTRACT

A FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF CHANGES IN THE VALUES OF CHILDREN BY COLLEGE ALUMNI FROM 1977 TO 1986

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This follow-up study is part of a long-term project assessing changes in the values of children over the lifespan. The current study was a comparison of the perceived values of children of college alumni in 1986 with the perceived values of children of the same population in 1977 when they were undergraduate college students. Nine specific values related to having and raising children were assessed on the Likert-type Value of Children Attitude Scale (VOC). Specific changes were found in values of children between the college alumni in 1986 and when they were nine years younger in 1977. Gender also had a significant effect on the values of children. There was no significant interaction between age and gender. The study also found that parental status affected the values of children. Multivariate analyses of variance were conducted to test for effects.

Why do people have children? There are both advantages and disadvantages to having and raising children. Individual motivations for childbearing vary. The perceptions of these advantages and disadvantages, that is, the values of children, have been shown to vary by culture, race, socioeconomic status, religion, ethnicity, gender, parental status, as well as urban vs. rural status (Arnold, Bulatao, Buripakdi, Chung, Fawcett, Iritani, Lee, & Wu, 1975; Arnold & Fawcett, 1975; Hoffman & Manis, 1979; Hoffman, Thornton & Manis, 1978). One area that has received minimal attention is changes in the values of children over the lifespan. That is the focus of this study.

How do motivations for having children develop over the lifespan? Fertility norms and values are formed in childhood. Children have fertility expectations similar to norms for adults. The variables associated with children's fertility expectations are similar to those associated with adult norms (Gustavus, 1973; Philliber, 1980). Further, the dominant motivations for having children or childbearing motivations that are widely accepted by adults are learned by the age of 10. Children reflect both society at large and their parents in their perceptions of the values of having and rearing children (Namerow & Philliber, 1983; Philliber, 1980; Rothenberg & Philliber, 1986).

Little is known about changes in the values of children over the adult years. The major national and cross-national studies of the values of children among adults have not differentiated by age (Arnold et al, 1975; Arnold & Fawcett, 1975; Hoffman & Manis, 1979; Hoffman et al, 1978). However, differences found in the values of children between parents and nonparents (Hoffman & Manis, 1979; Hoffman et al, 1978) suggest that the transition to parenthood may be accompanied by changes in the values of children. Bulatao (1981) has proposed and documented a multistage theory of the values of children in which the specific values and disvalues of children change according to parity. Inter-generational studies of the values of children demonstrate both similarities and differences in values of children between mothers and their 10- to 18-year-old children (Namerow & Philliber, 1983; Philliber, 1980) and mothers and their college-age daughters (Callan & Gallois, 1983; Mullis, Mullis, & Gluck, 1985). However, differences could reflect cohort and parental status rather than true age differences while similarities could reflect intrafamilial socialization. The question of longitudinal changes in the values of children has not been addressed. What, if any, changes in the value of children occur over the lifespan? Are these changes related to parental status? That is the focus of the current study. Specifically, this study is a comparison of the values of children of

undergraduate college students in 1977 (Morahan, 1978; Morahan-Martin, 1982, 1983) and the values of children of the same population in 1986 when they are nine years older. It examines changes in the values of children as a function of age, gender, and parental status.

The value of children encompasses both the positive functions and satisfactions of having children and the discomforts and costs of having children. In the present study, nine specific values of children were assessed using the Value of Children Attitude Scales (Arnold et al, 1975; Arnold & Fawcett, 1975). These include six positive and three negative values of children. The six positive values of children deal with the benefits from having children. They include: (1) children for continuity, tradition, and security; (2) parenthood satisfactions and sense of achievement from children; (3) role motivations of parenthood; (4) happiness and affection from children; (5) goals and incentives from having children; and (6) social status from children. The last three values deal with dimensions other than satisfactions. These include (7) external controls pressuring one to become a parent; (8) the costs of children; and (9) decision mindedness in childbearing.

METHOD

Subjects

Both samples were taken from undergraduate students enrolled in psychology courses at Bryant College in Rhode Island in spring 1977. The original sample, called the college students in this paper, anonymously completed surveys in class. The follow-up sample, also anonymous, completed a survey which was mailed to all alumni who had been part of the original population, i.e., psychology students in 1977 (N = 487), and for whom there was a current address (N = 352). They are called the alumni throughout this study.

There were 341 college students in the original 1977 study. The sample consisted of 178 males (52%) and 193 females (48%). The students ranged from 18 to 28 with only six students (1.8%) between 24 and 28 years old. Eight students (2%) were parents and seven (2%) were currently married.

There were 160 alumni in the 1986 study. The return rate for the mailed survey was 45%. The alumni sample consisted of 89 males (56%) and 71 females (44%). The alumni ranged in age from 27 to 37 with only eight alumni (5%) between 33 and 37. Eighty alumni were parents (50%) and 116 were married (73%).

Of the males, 45 were fathers (51%) and 68 were married (76%). Of the females, 35 were mothers (49%) and 48 were married (67%). Ninety-one percent of the parents had one child (55%) or two children (36%).

PROCEDURE

The main goal of this study was to assess if there were changes with age in the perceived values of children by gender between college students in 1977 and the same population in 1986 when they were nine years older. The study also assessed differences by gender in the perceived values of children between parents and nonparents in the older, alumni group. The independent variables were age group, college or alumni, as determined by the year of testing; gender; and parental status, which were assessed by direct questions. The dependent variables were the nine specific values of children which are assessed on the Likert-type Value of Children Attitude Scales (Arnold et al, 1975; Arnold & Fawcett, 1975).

TREATMENT OF THE DATA

It was anticipated that the alumni's perceptions of the values of children have shifted on some of the values of children in the nine years since 1977. Specifically, it was predicted that the alumni, now in their late twenties and early thirties, would emphasize more then they did earlier the following values: children as a source of continuity, tradition, and security; happiness and affection from children; goals and incentives from children; social status from children; as well as the costs of children and the need for decision mindedness in childbearing. Further, it was anticipated that gender would have a significant effect on the values of children with men expected to agree more than women on the following values of children: children as a source of continuity, tradition, and security; role motivations from children; social status from children; and the costs of children. An interaction effect between age and gender also was predicted. To test these hypotheses, a 2x2 multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with gender and age as independent variables and the nine values of children as dependent

variables.

Previous research has shown that there are differences in the perceived values of children between parents and nonparents (Bulatao, 1981; Hoffman & Manis, 1979; Hoffman et al, 1978). Parents generally rate the following values of children higher than nonparents: children as a source of continuity, tradition, and security; parenthood satisfactions and sense of achievement; role motivations from children; happiness and affection from children; and social status from children. It was anticipated that the same differences between alumni parents and nonparents would be found and that these differences would be true for each gender. Further, it is anticipated that there would be gender effects and that the alumni men and women will continue to significantly differ from each other on the same values of children as they did when they were younger. That is, the alumni men would agree more than the alumni women on the following values of children: children as a source of continuity, tradition, and security; role motivations from children; social status from children; and the costs of children. To test these hypotheses, a 2x2 multivariate analysis of variance was conducted on the alumni sample with parental status and gender as independent variables and the nine values of children as dependent variables. Comparisons between parents and nonparents were not conducted with the younger, college sample as only 2% of them were parents in 1977.

RESULTS

Results of the age by gender (2x2) MANOVA revealed highly significant effects for gender and age, as indicated by the year of testing, but no interaction between gender and age. Where significant main effects were found, univariate analyses of variance were performed to isolate significant dependent variables of the nine values of children. The F based on the Wilks' Criterion for the main effect of age was .92 (p .001, df=9,489). There was less agreement on each of the specific values of children in 1986 than in 1977. This reached significance in five of the nine specific values of children on the univariate ANOVA follow-ups. Univariate ANOVA follow-ups on the dependent values of children revealed

significant differences on five of the nine specific values of children. There was significantly less agreement in the older alumni sample than when they were younger on the following values (df=1,497): parenthood satisfactions (F=8.93, p .003); role motivations (F=4.68, p .031); external controls on childbearing (F=7.97, p .005); costs of children (F=14.00, p .001); and decision-mindedness in childbearing (F=11.44, p .001). For the main effect of gender, the F based on Wilks' Criterion was 4.46 (p .001, df=9,489). Males agreed more than females on all nine dependent scales with significance reached on four of the nine values of children. Univariate ANOVA follow-up tests found that with both years combined males agreed significantly more than females on the following values (df=1,497): children for continuity, tradition, and security (F=6.85, p .009); role motivations (F=8.54, p .004); social status from children (F=22.21, p .001); and the costs of children (F=8.05, p .005). There was no significant interaction between age and gender (F=.62, p .785, df=9,489).

The results of the parental status by gender (2x2) MANOVA on the older, 1986 alumni sample were significant for the main effect of parental status but not for the main effect of gender nor for the interaction of parental status and gender. The F based on the Wilks' Criterion for the effect of parental status was 3.63 (p .001, df=9,148). Univariate ANOVA follow-ups found significant levels on three of the nine dependent value of children scales (df=1,156). Parents rated goals and incentives from children higher than nonparents (F=10.66, p .001), while nonparents rated two negative aspects of having children higher than nonparents: the costs of children (F=5.80, p .017), and the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing (F=7.32, p .008). No significant main effects were found for gender among the alumni sample (F=1.44, p .178, df=9,148) nor was there significant interaction between parental status and gender (F=.77, p .647, df=9,148).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study was a follow-up comparison of the values of children of a population when they were college students in 1977 and again

when they were nine years older in 1986. It was anticipated that the older alumni will have changed in their perceptions on specific values of children now that they are in their late twenties and early thirties and that gender would have a significant effect on how children were valued. Results of the age x gender MANOVA do indicate that there were changes with age in the perceived motivations for having children. The precise changes are difficult to interpret. It had been anticipated that as the alumni approached thirty they would place more emphasis on both the joys and real costs and constraints of parenthood. None of the predicted hypotheses on the effect of age on the values of children were supported. In fact, differences by age were the reverse of what had been anticipated. That is, there was less agreement among the alumni in 1986 than when they were nine years younger in 1977 on the values of children overall. These differences reached significance on five of the nine values of children. Two of these were positive values of childbearing; parental satisfactions and role motivations; while three included all of the negative values associated with childbearing: external controls on childbearing, costs of children, and the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing. It does seem that the alumni are less concerned with the constraints of parenthood than they were as undergraduates while they see parenthood as providing less of a life role and less satisfaction than they did as undergraduates. It is also possible that the differences found between the alumni in 1986 and 1977 reflect societal and historical changes in the values associated with childbearing rather than developmental changes. An earlier study found significant changes in the perceived values of children among college students in 1977 and in 1986 (Morahan-Martin, 1986). Although the pattern of changes was different in the present study than in the college student study, two of the negative values were lower in 1986 than in 1977 for both college students and alumni in 1986: costs of children and the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing. Additional analysis is planned.

Gender also had a significant effect on the nine values of children when the 1986 alumni sample was combined with the 1977 student sample. Overall, men agreed more than women on each of the nine values of children with significance reached of four values: children for continuity,

tradition, and security; role motivations; social status from children; and the costs of children. These differences or effects had been found in the 1977 study and had been predicted based on the earlier study. The finding that men more than women favor children to continue family name and tradition is not surprising in a patriarchal society and is consistent with other studies (Arnold & Fawcett, 1975; Hoffman, Thornton & Manis, 1978). It is important to note that gender did not have a significant effect in the 1986 sample when a separate parental status x gender MANOVA was performed on the alumni group. Thus, it appears that the effect of gender found in the age x gender MANOVA for the combined 1977 and 1986 sample are largely due to the effect of gender in the 1977 college students. This is reflected in the lack of interaction between age and gender in the combined 1977 and 1986 MANOVA.

Parental status also affected how children were valued. A parental status x gender MANOVA was performed on the older alumni group alone as they were equally divided between parents and nonparents while only 2% had been parents in 1977. Parents rated goals and incentives from children higher than nonparents while, not surprisingly, nonparents rated two negative aspects of having children higher than nonparents: the costs of children; and the need for decision-mindedness in childbearing. Previous research had shown that there are differences in the perceived values of children between parents and nonparents (Bulatao, 1981; Hoffman & Manis, 1979; Hoffman et al, 1978). However, in these studies parents rated all the other values of children higher than nonparents: children as a source of continuity, tradition, and security; parenthood satisfactions and sense of achievement; role motivations from children; happiness and affection from children; and social status from children. These differences had been predicted in the current study and were not found. Finally, there was no significant interaction between parental status and gender in the older alumni sample.

Although the sample and scope of the current study is limited, this study does provide some support that age, gender, and parental status does affect how one values children. It is hoped that future research will provide more information on the factors affecting changes in how children are valued over the lifespan.

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